



Childhood Connections

March 6, 2025

Spotlight on Office of Childhood Teams!

Throughout 2025, this newsletter will spotlight team members who work in the Office of Childhood (OOC) and their “why” for supporting children, families, and the professionals who work directly with them.



Betsy White is the Program Manager of the Home Visiting section. Betsy oversees the Missouri Parent Education Program, Missouri Parenting Partnership Program, Maternal and Infant Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program, Title V Maternal and Child Health (MCH) Block Grant Home Visiting, and the Safe Cribs of Missouri program. Betsy came to DESE with 15 years of experience as a home visitor, supervisor, and program manager of Healthy Families America in Randolph County. Her “why” is that she remembers being a young mother and knows the importance of community and support in raising a family. She believes families are the foundation of our society and the first few years of a child’s life can set the pace for healthy, successful outcomes.

Lana Brooks is the Program Coordinator for the Missouri Parent Education Program. Her career began as a preschool coordinator for a Missouri Accredited child care facility in Jefferson City. After four years in child care, she stepped out of the classroom and into the Early Learning section at DESE. Lana has been with the department, specifically the Parents as Teachers Parent Education Program, for 30 years. Her “why” comes from her commitment to



build relationships with Missouri school districts and home visiting programs to ensure quality services for Missouri families.



Rebecca Chitima is Senior Research Analyst in the Home Visiting Section. She spent the last 30 years working in the research and public health sector at the University of Missouri and the Department of Health and Senior Services. At DESE, she manages data and analytical work for home visiting programs and serves as a liaison between programs and the data systems to derive the data required for program planning, reporting, evaluation, and improvement. She supervises the Research Data/Analysts working on the home visiting program data and Continuous Quality Improvement activities. Her “why” is best represented by a quote from Frederick Douglass: “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

Beth Stieferman is a Program Coordinator of the Home Visiting section. Beth has worked with children and families directly as a School Health Program Coordinator in a local school district for 25 years and came to state government to work in the Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) School Health Program in 2008. In 2010, Beth transitioned to work with federally funded home visiting



programs at DHSS and transitioned to continue this work in her current role in the OOC in 2021. Her “why” has been devoted to helping ensure children are safe, healthy, and ready to become successful learners and supporting their families.

COMING SOON! In-Person Listening Sessions for Child Care Licensing

In support of the [Executive Order 25-15](#) issued by Governor Kehoe, charging DESE with a minimum of 10% reduction in regulations, OOC has the opportunity to update child care licensing rules.

OOO staff will be hosting in-person listening sessions to gather feedback from stakeholders related to child care licensing rules.

Listening sessions will be held regionally in March and April. Please see [the In-Person Listening Sessions Flyer](#) for information on the dates and locations of sessions in your region.

ANNOUNCEMENT! MOPD System Updates

The Office of Childhood has been working with developers to improve user experience with the Missouri Professional Development system (MOPD) and is pleased to announce these features are now live.

The system is now more user friendly and easier to navigate on a mobile device. New flyers, written instructions, and instructional videos explain the updates.

See [the Missouri Professional Development System webpage](#) for full details. The System Announcements portion of the webpage has been updated to reflect these improvements. Contact



UPDATE! Office of Childhood Leadership

There has been a change in leadership of the Office of Childhood at the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE).

Effective February 24, 2025, DESE Deputy Commissioner Kelli Jones will serve in the interim as the main point of contact for the office. She can be reached at 573-619-6693 or kelli.jones@dese.mo.gov. Pam Thomas is no longer working at DESE.

UPDATE! Office of Childhood Contact Information

Did you know OOC publishes a printable [Contact Us](#) document that

MOPD@dese.mo.gov or call 573-526-8273 with questions.

REMINDER! MOPD System Training

Anyone using the MOPD system, including child care administrators and educators, can register for MOPD System Trainings. These trainings offer an introduction to the system and how to enhance your program and professional development strategies. Attendees who complete the training will earn two clock hours.

The training is available virtually and in person. Training times and dates are available on [the MOPD Training flyer](#).

Contact MOPD at 573-526-8273 or register by logging into your MOPD account.

NEW! Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Consultation

The OOC is excited to announce [a New Infant & Early Childhood Mental Health Initiative](#)!

The goal of this initiative is to provide statewide multi-tiered systems of support to child care professionals caring for and responding to children with challenging behavior. This support will promote positive social-emotional development, reduce persistent challenging behavior, and prevent or reduce expulsion or suspension from child care programs.

When participating in this initiative, child care professionals may receive the following support:

- Social-emotional development training
- Ongoing coaching and mentorship
- Access to supports, resources, and referrals
- Individualized interventions for children with persistent challenging behaviors, in collaboration with their families and child care professionals

Referrals may be made through [the IECMH Referral Form](#) or by calling 573-882-7022. For other inquiries the program may be reached through [the IECMH Contact Form](#) or by calling 573-882-9388.

REMINDER! Training Series for Professionals

includes the phone numbers and email addresses for every program administered by OOC?

This page was recently updated with current contact information.

UPDATE! Child Care and Development Fund (CCDF) Webinar

OOC staff hosted its quarterly webinar for stakeholders and child care providers featuring topics related to Missouri's 2025-2027 CCDF State Plan on Wednesday, February 19, 2025.

This webinar covered information about Governor Kehoe's State of the State Address, the CCDF State Plan, ongoing Child Care Data System training, and the Subsidy Contract Renewal Process.

You can review [the recording](#) and a copy of [the PowerPoint slides](#) if you were unable to attend.

The next CCDF webinar will be in May 2025.

REMINDER! Subsidy Payment Resolution Requests

Per [the child care subsidy contract terms and conditions](#), providers have 60 days from the end of a service month to submit a Payment Resolution Request

A new free online training series on working with children who have experienced prenatal substance exposure and their families is now available. This six-part training series is specifically geared towards supporting home visitors.

In this training series professionals will learn about:

- Understanding parental substance use and implications for infants and young children
- How substances influence and alter infant brain development
- Short-term health and developmental implications of prenatal substance exposure
- Longer-term effects of prenatal substance exposure on child development
- Strategies to promote infant recovery and child development
- The effects of trauma on infant development and child learning

View [the training series flyer](#) to register and learn more.

NEW! Developmental Screening Promotional Materials

The OOC has [three new printable materials](#) that can be used to help promote free developmental screenings for children age three months to kindergarten entry. The screenings are conducted by the Missouri Parent Education Program available in every school district.

These resources include two flyers and a postcard available on [the Promotional Developmental Screening Materials](#) on Early Childhood Connections. Families can search for the contact information in their district by scanning the QR code on the above materials or by going directly to [the Parents as Teachers Program Locator](#).

REMINDER! National Poison Prevention Week is March 16-22, 2025

National Poison Prevention Week (NPPW) is March 16-22, 2025. A NPPW toolkit and other resources are available to help promote poison prevention in your community [at America's Poison Centers webpage](#).

(PRR) if there was a discrepancy in their payment.

OOC recently found the Child Care Data System (CCDS) is not consistently applying this required timeline and it is being fixed in the system.

If you have a payment discrepancy, be sure to submit a PRR within the required 60-day timeframe.

RESOURCE! Department of Mental Health Workplace Wellness

The Missouri Department of Mental Health has developed free, on-demand [training about workplace wellness](#). These quick impactful lessons provide practical tools to foster healthy work environments.

The lessons are free to access by [making an account](#) on the educational content page on the Department of Mental Health webpage.

TRAINING! ECHO Autism Resources

Families and staff looking to support children with autism may find behavioral, diagnostic, educational, family support, and medical condition resources by visiting [ECHO Autism Resources webpage](#).

Don't wait until a poisoning emergency occurs- now is the time to save the Poison Control Hotline Number 1-800-222-1222 to your phone. The Missouri Poison Center App is also available for download, additional information on downloading the App can be found [Missouri Poison Center webpage](#).

Find additional educational resources on poison prevention on the Missouri Poison Center website at [Community Education - Trusted Poison Help - Missouri Poison Center](#).

ANNOUNCEMENT! Become a Home Visiting Professional Development Specialist

Child Care Aware® of Missouri is assisting the Council for Professional Recognition in seeking passionate professionals to mentor fellow Home Visitors as Professional Development (PD) Specialists.

PD Specialists support Home Visitors earn their national Child Development Associate (CDA) credential. These specialists are awarded a \$100 honorarium from the Council to conduct a verification visit with the Home Visitor CDA candidate at the conclusion of their CDA process. PD Specialists share their home visiting experience to inspire and empower colleagues in the field while continuing their own professional growth through the responsibilities of their existing position. Earning a CDA fosters a home visitors professional growth while receiving an honorarium for providing expertise.

If interested in becoming a PD Specialist, apply at [The Council for Professional Recognition](#) to complete a two-hour training.

Learn more about this opportunity by contacting info@mochildcareaware.org.

ECHO Autism has produced [expert videos](#) to make training accessible; content includes guides on behavioral challenges, education, development, communication, and many more subjects to support each child's needs.

REMINDER! Transition from First Steps to Early Childhood Special Education

Many children in the Missouri First Steps program transition to Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) services through their local school districts.

The OOC maintains a webpage with information and training on transition for First Steps and ECSE staff.

To view a recorded transition training, frequently asked questions, and other important transition resources, visit our [Transition from First Steps to Early Childhood Special Education webpage](#).

REMINDER! Imagination Library Registration is Open

Dolly Parton's Imagination Library is now available for every child ages birth to 5 years in Missouri. A parent or guardian can register their child on [the Imagination](#)

[Library national webpage](#). Books will be mailed directly to the home of registered children at no cost to the family.

Learn about Imagination Library enrollment in your area by [visiting our Imagination Library webpage](#).

RESOURCE! Well Fed Means Less Lead!

Children with empty stomachs can absorb more lead than children with full stomachs. A diet including iron, calcium, and vitamin C can help protect children from absorbing lead.

Good sources of dietary iron include lean red meats, fish, chicken, iron-fortified cereals, and dried fruits.

More information about lead poisoning and the DHSS Childhood Lead Poisoning Prevention Program, visit [DHSS's Lead Poisoning webpage](#). Emails can be sent to Teresa.Wortmann@health.mo.gov or Maggie.Burns@health.mo.gov. By phone, dial 573-751-6102.

Spotlight on Success

Spotlight on Success aims to share stories from local programs that are building community partnerships in order to strengthen and coordinate childhood programs.



Photo Credit: Tara Espinoza/News Tribune photo: First Lady Teresa Parson, background right, tours Eagles Nest Preschool Center in Eugene, Missouri, on Tuesday, March 12, 2024, alongside school board members and Cole County R-5 Elementary Principal Sarah Strobel.

In 2024, Cole County R-V School District completed an expansion of Eagles Nest Early Childhood Learning Center, increasing capacity to nearly 100 students. This expansion was made possible in part by the Missouri Preschool Quality Program (MOQPK) grant funding and highlights the importance of early childhood education and investments in educational opportunities for young learners.

In partnership with the DESE through the MOQPK grant, Eagles Nest has been able to pursue and retain qualified staff and focus on professional development for its educators. Staff have received training on best practices for early childhood education, allowing them to provide more individualized support. They have also been able to purchase high-quality educational materials and technology, create engaging learning spaces, and ensure a curriculum that meets the developmental needs of every child.

One of the most significant changes has been the ability to expand access to more families in the community. Now, more children can benefit from a strong educational foundation and families are able to see the tangible impact of the investment in their children's future. The families of both prospective and enrolled students benefit from the stable, safe environment contributed to by the expansion. Growth of their core programs allows the Eagle's Nest to provide support for important community programs such as Parents as Teachers and the Eagles Club Before and After School Care program.

Sarah Strobel, Cole County R-V Elementary Principal said, "The growth in the capacity of students we are able to serve...is more than just a number—it represents lives changed, potential unlocked, and a brighter future for dozens of children and their families. With the continued support of the community and

programs like MOQPK, Eagles Nest is poised to build on this success, inspiring young minds and setting the stage for a lifetime of achievement.”

OOO Monthly Stakeholder Webinar

Join us for the next OOC Stakeholder webinar on **Wednesday, March 19, 2025**, from noon to 12:45 p.m. to learn more and ask questions. You can [access the webinar](#) in a Google Chrome or Safari web browser. Do not view in Internet Explorer. We hope you can participate!

A [recording](#) and [the PowerPoint slides](#) from the February 2025 webinar are available in case you were unable to attend and wish to hear the information.

For questions about the stakeholder webinar series, or suggestions for topics in future webinars, email us at Childhood@dese.mo.gov.

Archived Editions of Childhood Connections

[Visit the OOC webpage to find previous editions of Childhood Connections.](#)

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